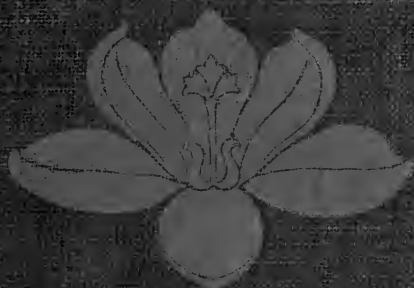


THE
RUINOUS
FACE



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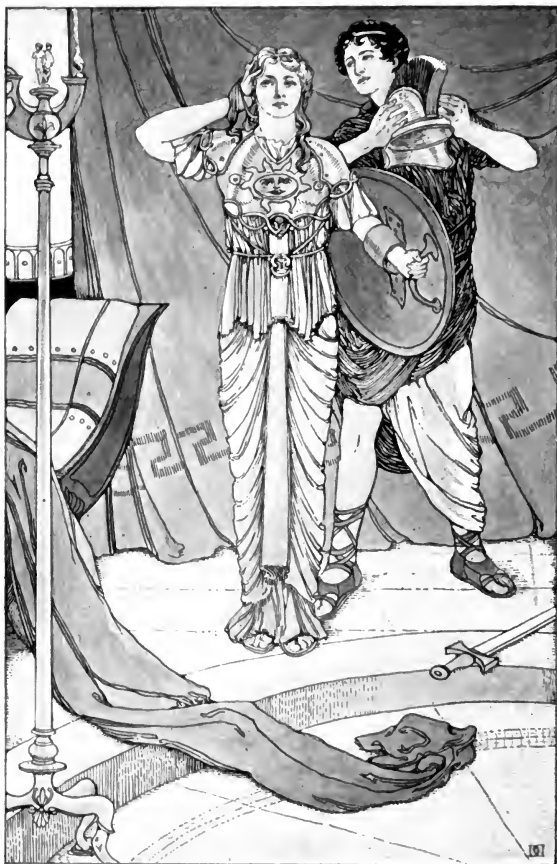
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THE RUINOUS FACE

BY
MAURICE HEWLETT

ILLUSTRATED



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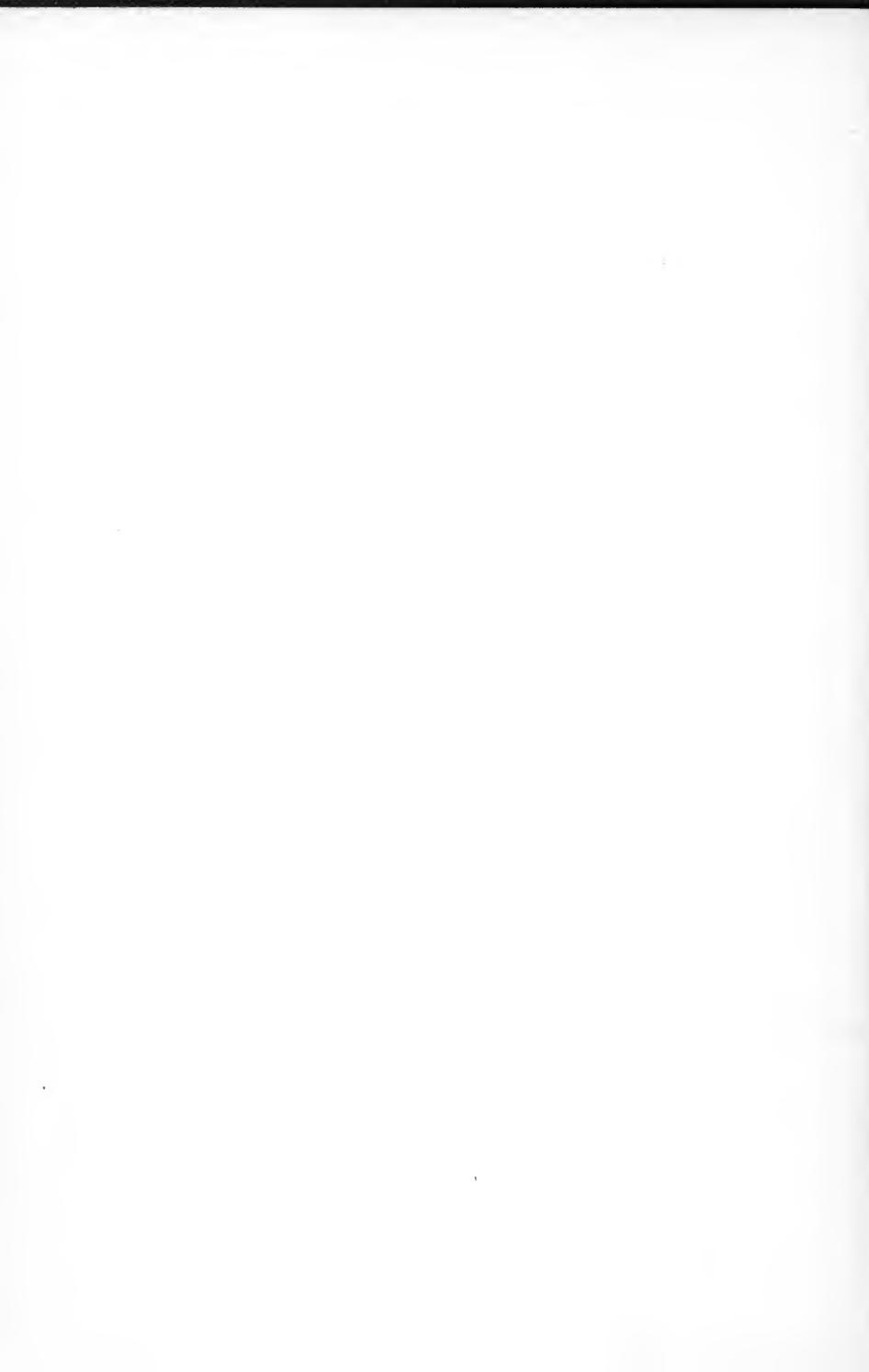
Published October, 1909.

“Hence there is in Rhodes a sanctuary
of Helen of the Tree.”

—*Pausanias*, iii., 19, 9.

ILLUSTRATIONS

HELEN AND EUTYCHES	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
THE ABDUCTION OF HELEN . .	<i>Facing p.</i>	8
From the painting by Rudolph von Deutsch.		
HELEN OF TROY	“	20
From the painting by Sir Fred- erick Leighton.		
PARIS AND HELEN	“	30
From the painting by Jacques Louis David in the Louvre.		



THE RUINOUS FACE





THE RUINOUS FACE

WHEN the siege of Troy had been ten years doing, and most of the chieftains were dead, both of those afield and those who held the walls; and some had departed in their ships, and all who remained were leaden-hearted; there was one who felt the rage of war insatiate in his bowels: Menelaus, yellow-haired King of the Argives. He, indeed, rested not day or night, but knew the fever fretting at his members, and the burning in his heart. And when he scanned the windy plain about the city, and the desolation of it; and when he saw the huts of the Achæans, and the furrows



THE RUINOUS FACE

where the chariots ploughed along the lines, and the charred places of camp-fires, smoke - blackened trees, and puddled waters of Scamander, and corn-lands and pastures which for ten years had known neither plough nor deep-breathed cattle, nor querulous sheep; even then in the heart of Menelaus was no pity for Dardan nor Greek, but only for himself and what he had lost—white-bosomed Helen, darling of Gods and men, and golden treasure of the house.

The vision of her glowing face and veiled eyes came to him in the night-season to make him mad, and in dreams he saw her, as once and many times he had seen her, lie supine. There as she lay in his dream, all white and gold, thinner than the mist-wreath upon a mountain, he would cry aloud for his loss, and throw his arms out over the empty bed, and feel his eye-sockets

THE RUINOUS FACE

smart for lack of tears; for tears came not to him, but his fever made his skin quite dry, and so were his eyes dry. Therefore, when the chiefs of the Achæans in Council, seeing how their strength was wearing down like a snowbank under the sun, looked reproachfully upon him, and thought of Hector slain, and of dead Achilles who slew him, of Priam, and of Diomedes, and of tall Patroclus, he, Menelaus, took no heed at all, but sat in his place, and said, "There is no mercy for robbers of the house. Starve whom we cannot put to the sword. Lay closer leaguer. So shall I win my wife again and have honor among the Kings, my fellows." So he spake, for it was so he thought day and night; and Agamemnon, King of Men, bore with him, and carried the voices of all the Achæans. For since the death of Achilles there was no man stout enough to gainsay him, or deny him anything.



THE RUINOUS FACE

In those days there was little war, since every man outside the walls was sick of strife, and consumed with longing for his home, and wife and children there. And one told another, "My son will be a grown man in his first beard," and one, "My daughter will be a wife." As for the men of Troy, it was well for them that their foes were spent; for Hector was dead, and Agenor, and Troilus; and King Priam, the old, was fallen into dotage, which deprived him of counsel. He loved Alexandros only, whom men called Paris. On which account Æneas, the wise prince, stood apart, and kept himself within the walls of his house. There remained only that beauteous Paris, the ravisher. Him Helen held fast enchained by her white arms and slow, sweet smile, and by the shafts of light from her kind eyes. All the compliance of a fair woman made for love lay in her; she could refuse nothing



THE RUINOUS FACE

that was asked of her by him who had her. And she was gentle and very modest, and never dejected or low of heart; but when comfort was asked of her she gave it, and when solace, solace; and when he cried, "Oh for a deep draught of thee!" she gave him his desire. In these days he seldom left his hall, where she sat at the loom with her maids, or had them comb and braid her long hair. But of other women, wives and widows of heroes, Andromache mourned Hector dead and outraged, and Cassandra the wrath to come. Through the halls of the King's house came little sound but of women weeping loss; therefore, if love made Helen laugh sometimes, she laughed low and softly, lest some other should be offended. The streets were all silent, and the dogs ate one another. In the temples of the Gods they neglected the sacrifice, and what little might be offered was eaten by clouds of birds.



THE RUINOUS FACE

Anniversaries and feasts were like common days. If the Gods were offended with Troy, there was no help for it. Men must live first, before they can serve God.

Now the tenth year was come to the Spring, when young men and virgins worship Artemis the Bright; and abroad on the plains the crocus was aflower, and the anemone; and the blades of the iris were like swords stuck hilt downward in the earth. A green veil spread lightly over the land, and men might see a tree scorched black upon one side and budded with gold upon the other. Melted snow brimmed Simois and Scamander; cranes and storks built their nests, and one stood sentinel while his mate sat close, watchful in the reeds. On the mild, westerly airs came tenderness to bedew the hearts of men war-weary. They stepped carefully lest they should



THE RUINOUS FACE

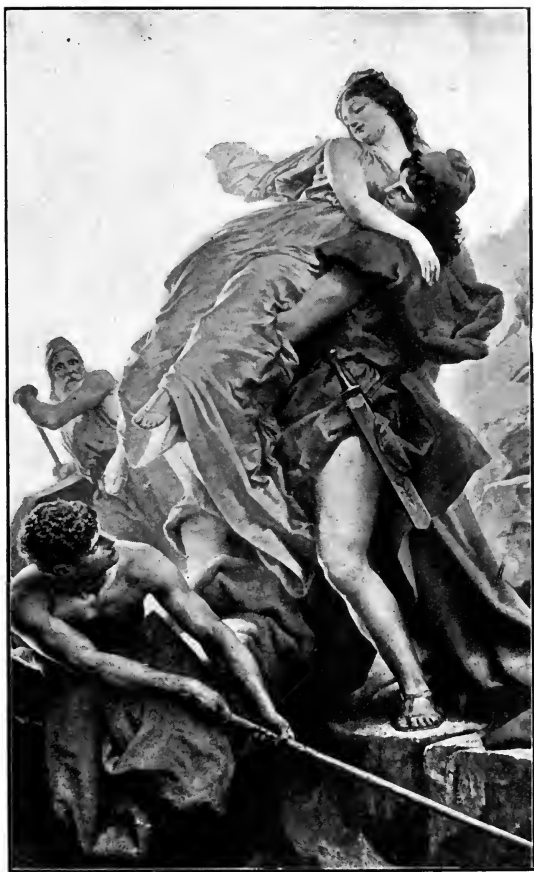
crush young flowers, thinking in their minds, "God's pity must restrain me. If so fair a thing can thrive in place so foul, who am I to mar it?" But upon Menelaus, the King, the season worked like a ferment, so that he could never stay long in one place. All night long he turned and stretched himself out; but in the gray of the morning he would rise, and walk abroad by himself over the silent land, and about the sleeping walls of the city. So found he balm for his ache, and so he did every day.

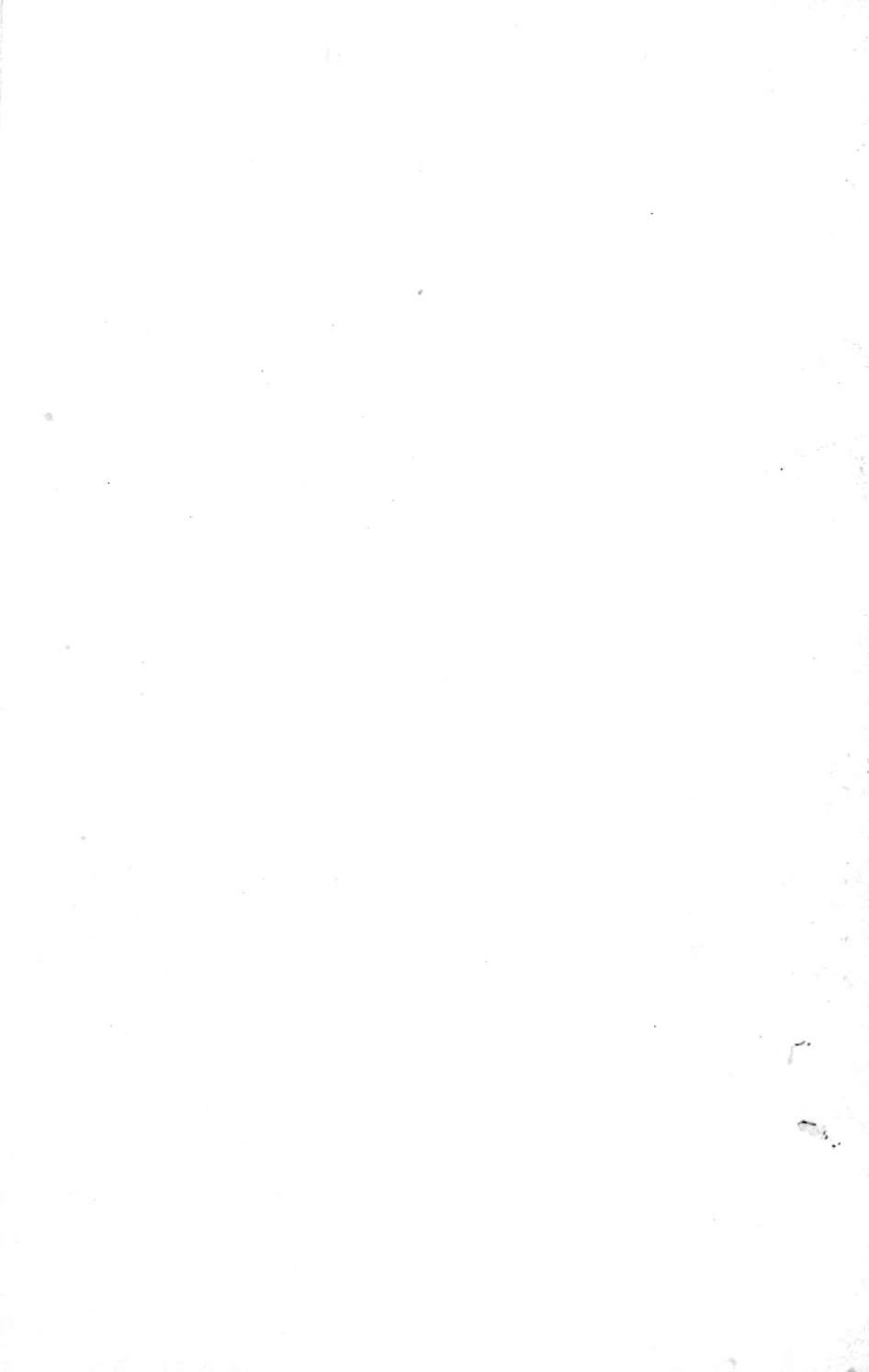
The house of Paris stood by the wall, and the garden upon the roof of the women's side was there upon it, and stretched far along the ramparts of Troy. King Menelaus knew it very well, for he had often seen Helen there with her maids when, with a veil to cover her face up to the eyes, she had stood there to watch the fighting, or the games about



THE RUINOUS FACE

the pyre of some chieftain dead, or the manège of the ships lying off Tenedos. Indeed, when he had been there in his chariot, urging an attack upon the gate, he had seen Paris come out of the house to Helen where she stood in the garden; and he saw that deceiver take the lovely woman in his arm, and with his hand withdraw the veil from her mouth that he might look at it. The maids were all about her, and below raged a battle among men; but he cared nothing for these. No, but he lifted up her face by the chin, and stooped his head, and kissed her twice; and would have kissed her a third time, but that by chance he saw King Menelaus below him, who stood up in his chariot and watched. Then he turned lightly and left her, and went in, and so presently she too, with her veil in her hand, not yet over her mouth, looked down from the wall and saw the King, her husband. Long





THE RUINOUS FACE

and deeply looked she; and he looked up at her; and so they stood, gazing each at the other. Then came women from the house and veiled her mouth, and took her away. Other times, too, he had seen her there, but she not him; and now, at this turn of the year, the memory of her came bright and hard before him; and he walked under the wall of the house in the gray of the morning. And as he walked there fiercely on a day, behold she stood above him on the wall, veiled, and in a brown robe, looking down at him. And they looked at each other for a space of time. And nobody was by.

Shaking, he said, "O Ruinous Face, art thou so early from the wicked bed?"

She said low, "Yea, my lord, I am so early."

"These ten long years," he said then, "I have walked here at this hour, but never yet saw I thee."

THE RUINOUS FACE

She answered, "But I have seen my lord, for at this hour my lord Alexandros is accustomed to sleep and I to wake. And so I take the air, and am by myself."

"O God!" he said, "would that I could come at thee, lady." She replied him nothing. So, after a little while of looking, he spoke to her again, saying, "Is this true which thou makest me to think, that thou walkest here in order that thou mayst be by thyself? Is it true, O thou God-begotten?"

She said, smiling a little, "Is it so wonderful a thing that I should desire to be alone?"

"By my fathers," he said, "I think it wonderful. And more wonderful is it to me that it should be allowed thee." And then he looked earnestly at her, and asked her this: "Dost thou, therefore, desire that I should leave thee?"

"Nay," said she slowly, "I said not so."

"Ask me to stay, and I stay," he said.



THE RUINOUS FACE

But she made no answer to that; but looked down to the earth at her feet. "Behold," said the King presently, "ten years and more since I have known my wife. Now if I were to cast my spear at thee and rive open thy golden side, what wonder were it? Answer me that."

She looked long at him, that he saw the deep gray of her eyes. And he heard the low voice answer him, "I know that my lord would never do it." And he knew it better than she, and the reason as well as she.

A little while more they talked together, alone in the sunless light; and she was in a gentle mood, as indeed she always was, and calmed the fret in him, so that he could keep still and take long breaths, and look at her without burning in his heart. She asked him of their child, and when he told her it was well, stood thoughtful and silent. "Here," said she,



THE RUINOUS FACE

presently, "I have no child;" and it seemed to him that she sighed.

"O Lady," he said, "dost thou regret nothing of all these ten long years?"

Her answer was to look long at him without speech. And then again she veiled her eyes with her eyelids and hung her head. He dared say nothing.

Paris came out of the house, fresh from the bath, rosy and beautiful, and whistled a low clear note, like the call of a bird at evening. Then he called upon Helen.

"Where is my love? Where is the Desire of the World?"

She looked up quickly at King Menelaus, and smiled half, and moved her hand; and she went to Paris. Then the King groaned, and rent himself. But he would not stay, nor look up, lest he should see what he dared not see.

Next day, very early, and every day after, those two, long-severed, kept a tryst:

THE RUINOUS FACE

so in time she came to be there first, and a strife grew between them which should watch for the other. And after a little she would sit upon the wall and speak happily to him without disguise. So happiness came to him, too, and he ceased to reproach her. For she reasoned very gently with him of her own case, urging him not to be angry with her. Defending herself, she said, "Thou shouldst not reproach me, husband, nor wouldst thou in thy heart if thou knewst what is in mine, or what my portion has been since with fair words in many-mansioned Sparta he did beguile me. With words smoother than honey, and sweeter than the comb of it he did beguile me, and with false words made me believe that I was forsaken and betrayed; and urged me to take ship with him in search of thee. Nor ever once did he reveal himself until we touched Cranæ in the ship. Then he showed me all his power, and declared



THE RUINOUS FACE

his purpose with me. And I could do nothing against him; and so he brought me to Troy and kept me there. All these years he has loved, and still loves me in his fashion: and art thou angry with me, my lord, that I do not for ever reproach him, or spend myself in tears, and fast, and go like one distraught, holding myself aloof from all his house? Nay, but of what avail would that be, or what reward to many that treat me well here in Troy? For King Priam, the old king, is good to me, and the Queen also; and my lord Hector was above all men good to me, and defended me always against scorn and evil report. True it is that I have been the reproach of men, both Trojans and Achæans; and all the woes of the years have been laid to me who am most guiltless of offence. For all my sin has been that I have been gentle with those who hold me here; and have not denied them that which cannot be denied,



THE RUINOUS FACE

but have given what I must with fair-seeming."

And another time she said, "What mercy have men for a woman whom they desire and cannot have? And what face have women for her who is more sought than them? And what of such a woman, O lord Menelaus, what of her in her misery? Is it true, thinkest thou, because she is good to look upon and is desired by men, that she should have no desires of her own? And must she have pleasure only in that which men seek of her, and none in her house and child overseas? Is my face then, and are these my breasts all that I have? And is my mind nothing at all, nor the kindness in my heart, nor the joy I have in the busy world? My face has been ruin unto many, and many have sought my breasts; but to me it has been misery and shame, and my milk a bitter gall."



THE RUINOUS FACE

Thus spake Helen of the fair girdle; and he saw her eyes filled with tears, and pure sorrow upon her face; and he held up his arms to her, crying, "O my dear one, wilt thou not come back to me?" She could not speak for crying; but nodded her head often between her covering hands.

Then he, seeing how her thoughts lay, gently toward home, and desiring to please her now more than anything in the world, spake of the child, swearing by the Gods of Lacedæmon that she was not forgotten. "Nay," he said, "but still she talks of her mother, and every day would know of her return. And those about her in our house, faithful ones, say, 'The King thy father has gone to bring our lady back; and all will be happy again.' And so," said he, "it shall be, beloved, if thou wilt but come." Then Helen lifted up her face from her covering hands, and showed him her eyes. And he said,



THE RUINOUS FACE

“O Wonder of the World, shall I come for thee?”

And her words were sped down the wall, soft as dropping rose-leaves: “Come soon.” And King Menelaus returned to his quarters, glorying in his strength.

This day he took counsel with King Agamemnon his brother, and with Odysseus, wisest of the Achæans, and told them all. And while they pondered what the news might mean he declared his purpose, which was to have Helen again by all means, and to enter Troy disguised by night, and in the morning to drop with her in his arms over the wall, from the garden of Paris’ house. But Odysseus dissuaded him, and so did the King his brother; for they knew very well that Troy must be sacked, and the Achæans satisfied with plunder, and death, and women. For after ten years of strife men raven for such things, and will not give over until



THE RUINOUS FACE

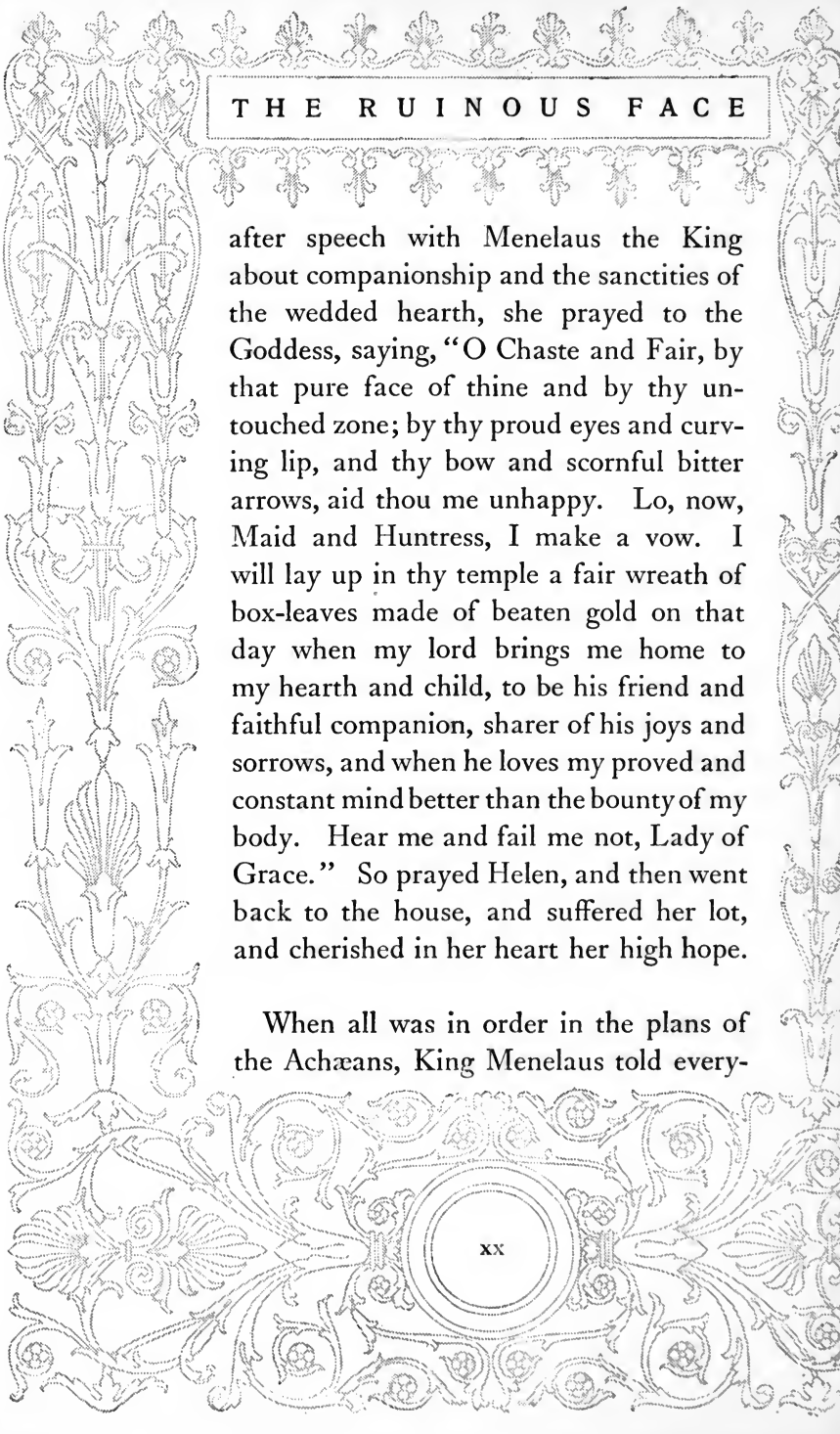
they have them. Also it was written in the heart of Hera that the walls of Troy must be cast down, and the pride thereof made a byword. So it was that the counsel of King Menelaus was overpassed, and that of Odysseus prevailed. And with him lay the word that he should make his plan, and tell it over to Menelaus, that he might tell it again to Helen when he saw her on the wall.

At this time a great heart was in Helen, and strong purpose. And it was so that while Paris marvelled to see her beauty wax ever the clearer, and while he loved her more than ever he had, and found her compliance the sweeter, he guessed nothing of what spirit it was that possessed her, nor of what she did when she was by herself. Nor could he guess, since she refused him never what he asked of her, how she weighed him lightly beside Menelaus her husband; nor, while she let her-



THE RUINOUS FACE

self be loved, what soft desires were astir in her heart to be cherished as a wife, sharer of a man's hearth, partaker of his counsels, comforter in his troubles, and mother of his sons. But it came to pass that the only joy of her life was in the seeing King Menelaus in the morning, and in the reading in his gaze the assurance of that peace which she longed for. And, again, her pride lay in fitting herself for it when it should come. Now, therefore, she forsook the religion of Aphrodite, to whom all her duty had been before, and in a grove of olive-trees in the garden of the house had built an altar to Artemis Aristoboulé. There offered she incense daily, and paid tribute of wheaten cakes kneaded with honey, and little figures of bears such as virgins offer to the Pure in Heart in Athens. And she would have whipped herself as they do in Sparta had she not feared discovery by him who still had her. So every day

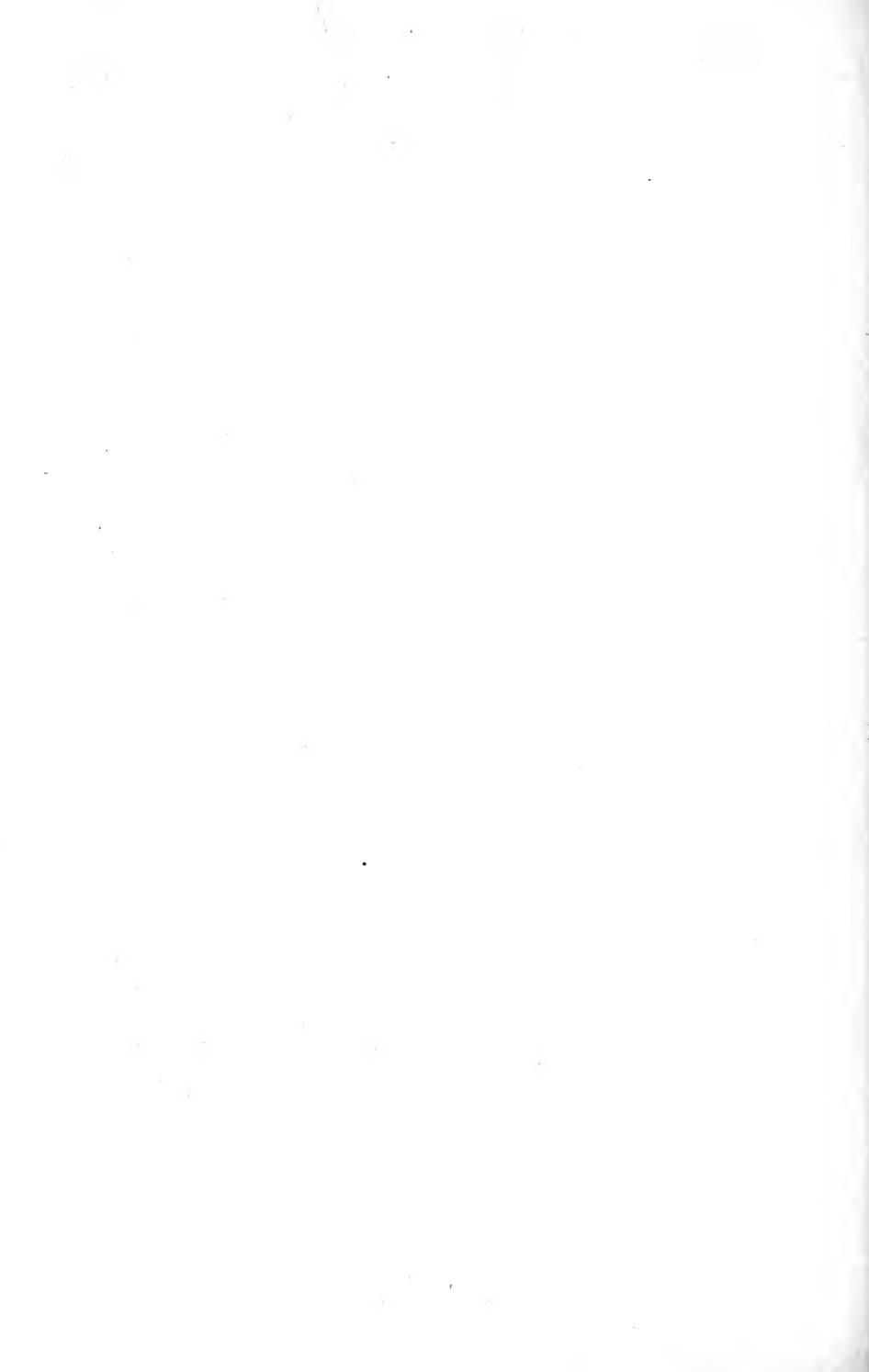


THE RUINOUS FACE

after speech with Menelaus the King about companionship and the sanctities of the wedded hearth, she prayed to the Goddess, saying, "O Chaste and Fair, by that pure face of thine and by thy untouched zone; by thy proud eyes and curving lip, and thy bow and scornful bitter arrows, aid thou me unhappy. Lo, now, Maid and Huntress, I make a vow. I will lay up in thy temple a fair wreath of box-leaves made of beaten gold on that day when my lord brings me home to my hearth and child, to be his friend and faithful companion, sharer of his joys and sorrows, and when he loves my proved and constant mind better than the bounty of my body. Hear me and fail me not, Lady of Grace." So prayed Helen, and then went back to the house, and suffered her lot, and cherished in her heart her high hope.

When all was in order in the plans of the Achæans, King Menelaus told every-







THE RUINOUS FACE

thing to Helen his wife; and how Odysseus was to come disguised into the city and seek speech with her. To the which she listened, marking every word; and bowed her head in sign of agreement; and at the end was silent, looking down at her lap and deeply blushing. And at last she lifted her eyes and showed them to the King, her husband, who marked them and her burning color, and knew that she had given him her heart again. So he returned that day to his quarters, glorifying and praising God. Immediately he went over to the tents of Odysseus, and sought out the prince, and said, "Go in, thou, this night, and the gray-eyed Goddess, the Maiden, befriend thee! This I know, Helen my wife shall be mine again before the moon have waned."

Odysseus nodded his head. "Enough said, Son of Atreus," said he. "I go in this night."



THE RUINOUS FACE

Now, in these days of weariness of strife, when the leaguer was not strict, the gates of Troy were often opened, now this one, now that, to let in fugitives from the hill-country. Odysseus, therefore, disguised himself as one of these, in sheep-skin coat and swathes of rushes round his legs; and he stood with wounded feet, leaning upon a holly staff, as one of a throng. White dust was upon his beard, and sweat had made seams in the dust of his face and neck. Then, when they asked him at the gate, "Whence and what art thou, friend?" he answered, "I am a shepherd of the hills, named Glykon, whose store of sheep the Achæans have reived, whose wife stolen away, whose little ones put to the sword and fire. Me only have they left alive; and where should I come if not here?" So they let him in, and he came and stood in the hall of Paris with many other wretches. Then presently came Helen of the starry eyes

THE RUINOUS FACE

and sweet pale face, she and her women to minister. And she knelt down with ewer and basin and a napkin to wash the feet of the poor. To whom, as she knelt at the feet of Odysseus, and rinsed his wounds and wiped away the dry blood, spake that crafty one in her ear, saying: "There are other wounds than mine for thy washing, lady, and deeper. For they are in the heart of King Menelaus, and in thy daughter's heart."

She kept her face hidden from him, bending to his feet; but he saw that she trembled and moved her shoulders. So then he said again, "I know that thou art pitiful. I know that thou wilt wash his wounds."

She answered him, whispering, "Yes; oh, yes."

He said, "Let me have speech with thee, lady, when may be."

And she, "It shall be when my lord sleepeth toward morning. Watch thou

for me here, before the sun rise." And he was satisfied with what she said.

Now, it was toward morning; and Odysseus watched in the hall of Paris. Then came Helen in, and stepped lightly over the bodies of sleeping men, and touched him on the shoulder where he sat by the wall with his chin upon his knees. Over her head was the hood of a dark blue cloak; and the cloak fell to her feet. Her face was covered, not so but that he could see the good intention of her eyes. And he arose and stood beside her, and she beckoned him to follow after. Then she took him to the grove of olive-trees in the garden, and burned incense upon the altar she had set up, and laid her hand upon the altar of Artemis the Bright. "So do that quick Avenger to me," she said, "as she did to Amphion's wife, whenas her nostrils were filled with the wind of her rage, if I play

THE RUINOUS FACE

false to thee, Odysseus." And Odysseus praised her. Then stooping, with her finger she traced the lines of Troy in the sand, and all the gates of it; and told over the number of the guard at each; and revealed the houses of the chiefs, where they stood, and the watches set.

Odysseus marked all in his heart. But he asked, "And which is the golden house of King Priam?"

She said, "Nay, but that I will not tell thee. For he has been always kind to me from the very first; and even when Hector, his beloved, was slain, he had no ill words for me, though all Troy hissed me in the shrines of the Gods, and women spat upon the doors of Paris' house as they passed by. Him, an old man, thou shalt spare for my sake who am about to betray him."

Odysseus said, "Be it so. One marvel I have, lady, and it is this: If now, in



THE RUINOUS FACE

these last days, thou wilt help thy people, why didst thou not before?"

She was silent for a while. Then she said, "I knew not then what now I know, that my lord, the King, loves me."

Odysseus marvelled. "Why," said he, "when all the hosts of the Achæans were gathered at his need, and out of all the nations of Hellas arose the cry of women bereaved and children fatherless, so that he might have thee again! And thou sayest, 'He loved thee not!'"

"Nay," said she quickly, "not so. But I knew very well that he desired me for his solace and delight, as other men have done and still do: but to be craved is one thing and to be loved is another thing. I am not all fair flesh, Odysseus: I am wife and mother and I would be companion and comforter of a man. Now I know of a truth that my husband loveth me dearly; and I sicken of Paris, who maketh me his delight. Hateful to me are the ways of



THE RUINOUS FACE

men with women. Have I not cause enough to hate them, these long years a plaything for his arms, and a fruit to allay the drouth of his eyes? Am I less a woman in that I am fair, or less woman grown because I can never be old? Now I loathe the sweet lore of Aphrodite, which she taught me too well; and all my hope is in that Blessed One whom men call Of Good Counsel. For, behold, love is a cruel thing of unending strife and wasting thought; but the ways of Artemis are ways of peace and they shall be my ways."

A little longer he reasoned with her, and appointed a day when the entry should be made; but then afterward, when light filled the earth and the coming of the sun was beacons upon the tops of the mountains, she arose and said:

"My husband awaits me. I must go to him;" and left Odysseus, and went to the wall to talk with Menelaus below it.



THE RUINOUS FACE

In her hand was a yellow crocus, sacred to Artemis the Bright. And Helen put it to her lips, and touched her eyes with it, and dropped it down the wall to Menelaus her husband.

Then the Greeks fashioned a great horse out of wood, and set the images of two young kings upon it, with spears of gold, and stars upon their foreheads made of gold. And they caused it to be drawn to the Skæan Gate in the night-time, and left it there for the Trojans to see. Dolon made it; but Odysseus devised the images of the two kings. And his craft was justified of itself. For the Trojans hailed in the images the twin-brothers of Helen, even Castor and Polydeuces, come to save the state for their sister's sake; and opened wide their gates, and drew in the horse, and set it upon the porch of the temple of Zeus the Thunder. There it stood for all to see. And King Priam was carried down in his litter to



THE RUINOUS FACE

behold it; and with him came Hecabe the Queen, and Paris, and Æneas, and Helen, with Cassandra the King's daughter.

Then King Priam lifted up his hands and blessed the horse and the riders thereof. And he said, "Hail to ye, great pair of brothers! Be favorable to us now, and speedy in your mercy."

But Cassandra wailed and tore at the covering of her breast, and cried out, "Ah, and they shall be speedy! Here is a woe come upon us which shall be mercy indeed to some of you. But for me there is no mercy."

Now was Helen, with softly shining eyes, close to the horse; and she laid her hand upon its belly and stroked it. And Cassandra saw her and reviled her, saying, "Thou shame to Ilium, and thou curse! The Ruinous Face, the Ruinous Face! Cried I not so in the beginning when they praised thy low voice and soft



THE RUINOUS FACE

beguiling ways? But thou too, thou shalt rue this night!"

But Helen laughed softly to herself, and stroked the smooth belly of the horse where her promise lay hidden. And they led Cassandra away, blind with weeping. And Helen returned to Paris' house and sought out Eutyches, a slave of the door, who loved her. Of him by gentle words and her slow sweet smile she besought arms: a sword, breastplate, shield and helmet. And when he gave them her, unable to deny her anything, she hid them under the hangings of the bed.

That night Paris came to her where she lay bathed and anointed, and sought her in love; and she denied him nothing. Him thought such joy had never been his since first he held her in his arms in Cranæ. Deeply and long he loved; and in the middle of the night a great horn





THE RUINOUS FACE

blew afar off, and there came the sound of men in the streets, running. That was the horn which they kept in the temple of Showery Zeus, to summon all Troy when needs were. Paris, at the sound thereof, lifted up his head from Helen's fair breast, listening. And again the great horn blew a long blast, and he said, "O bride, I must leave thee. Behold, they call from the temple of the God." But she took his face in her two hands and turned it about to look at her; and he saw love in her eyes and the dew of it upon her mouth, and kissed her, and stayed. So by and by the horn blew a third time, and there arose a great shout; and he started away from her, and stepped down from the bed, and stood beside it, unresolved. Then Helen put her arms about his body and urged herself toward him till her face touched his flank. And she clung to him, and looked up at him, and he stayed.

THE RUINOUS FACE

Now did rumor break out all at once, about the house and in the city afar off. Men cried, "The fire, the fire!" and "Save yourselves!" and "Oh, the Achæans!" and Paris tore himself away, and made haste to arm himself by the light of the fire in the city, which made the room as bright as day. And he put on all his harness, and took his sword and buckler, and ran out of the chamber and down the stairs, crying, "Arm ye, arm ye, and follow me!" Then Helen arose and swiftly withdrew the arms from below the bed, and called Eutyches to her from the gallery, and made him fasten the breastplate about her, and gird the thongs of the shield to her white arm, and fix the helmet of bronze upon her head. So he did, and trembled as he touched her; for he loved her out of measure and without hope. Then said she to Eutyches, "Arm thyself and follow me." And together, armed, they went down the stair.



THE RUINOUS FACE

There was a great press of men fighting about the doors of Paris' house, and loud rumor. But beyond in the city the Achæans in a multitude carried fire and sword from house to house. And there was the noise of women crying mercy, and calling their children's names. And the flames leaped roaring to Heaven; and the Gods turned away their faces; and Troy was down.

Now Paris, fighting, came backwards into the hall where Helen was; and Menelaus came fiercely after him, and in the doorway drove a spear at him that went through the leather of his shield, through all the folds of it and ran deep into the flesh of his throat where it fastens to the shoulder. Then Paris groaned and bent his knees, and fell, calling Helen by her name. Then came she in her bright harness, with a burning face, and stood over the body of Paris, and held out her arms to the King, saying, "Husband, lord,



THE RUINOUS FACE

behold, here am I, by your side!" Eutyches came after her, armed also.

Then Menelaus, with the bloody spear in his hand newly plucked from the neck of Paris, gazed at his wife, not knowing her. So presently he said, weak-voiced, "What is this, O loveliest in the world?" But he knew Eutyches again, who had been with him and her in Sparta, and said to him, "Disarm her, but with care, lest the bronze bruise her fair flesh." So Eutyches, trembling, disarmed her, that she stood a lovely woman before the King. And Menelaus, with a shout, took her in his arms and cried out above the fire and dust and shrieking in the street, "Come, come, my treasure and desire! Love me now or I die!"

But she clung to him, imploring. "Not here," she said, "not here, Menelaus. Take me hence; let me fare by thy side this night."

But he pressed her the closer, saying,

THE RUINOUS FACE

"Come, thou must love me now," and lifted her in his arms and ran up the stair and through the gallery of the house to the great chamber where of late she had lain. And he called her women to disrobe her; and Helen fell to crying bitterly, and said, "Oh, I am a slave, I am a slave: I am bought and sold and handed about." And she could not be comforted or stayed from weeping. But nothing recked King Menelaus for that.

When the walls of wide-wayed Troy were cast down, and of the towers and houses of the chiefs nothing stood but staring walls and rafters charred by fire; and when the temples of the Dardan Gods had been sacked, and scorn done to the body of Priam the Old; and Cassandra in the tent of King Agamemnon shuddered and rocked herself about; and when dogs had eaten the fair body of Paris, then the Achæans turned their eyes with long-

THE RUINOUS FACE

ing to their homesteads. So there was a great ship-building and launching of keels; and at last King Menelaus embarked for peopled Lacedæmon, and took his lovely wife with him in the ship, and stayed his course at Rhodes for certain days, resting there with Helen. There he set a close guard about her all day; and as Paris had loved her, so loved he. But she was wretched, and spent her days in weeping; and grew pale and thin, and was for ever scheming shifts how she might be delivered from such a life as she led. Ever by the door of the chamber stood Eutyches, and watched her closely, marking her distress. And she knew that he knew it; for what woman does not know the secret mind of a man with regard to her?

So, on a day, sat Helen by the window with her needlework in her lap, and looked out over the sea. Eutyches came into the

THE RUINOUS FACE

room where she was, silently, through the hangings of the door, and kneeling to her, kissed her knee. She turned to him her sad face, saying, "What wouldst thou of me, Eutyches?"

"Lady," he said, "thy pardon first of all."

She smiled upon him. "Thou hast it," she said; "what then?"

He said to her, "Lady, I have served thee these many years, and no man knows thy mind better than I do, who know it only from thy face. For I have been but a house-dog in thy sight. But I have never read it wrongly; and now I know that thou art unhappy.."

"Yes," she said, "it is true. I am very unhappy, and with reason."

Eutyches drew from his bosom a sharp sword and laid it upon her knee. "Take this sovereign remedy from thy servant," he said. "No ills can withstand it, so sharp it is." And he left her with the bare



THE RUINOUS FACE

sword upon her knees. She hid it in the coverings of the bed.

Now, when King Menelaus had feasted in the hall, he came immediately after into the Queen's chamber. And he said to her, "Hail, loveliest of women born!" and again, "Hail, thou Rose of the World!"

She answered him nothing, but went to her women and suffered herself to be made ready. Then came the King in to her and began to woo her; but she, looking strangely upon him by the light of the torch in the wall, sat up and held him off with her hand. "Touch me not, Menelaus," she said, "touch me no more until I know whether thou art true or false."

He was astonished at her, saying, "What is this, dear love? Dost thou call me false who for ten bitter years have striven to have thee again; and have forsworn all other women for thy sake?"

THE RUINOUS FACE

But her eyes were hard upon him, glittering. "Ay," she said, "and I do. For to thee, through those bitter years, I was faithful in heart, and utterly; and that which thou lovest is the bounty of my body, the which if I should mar it, thou wouldst spurn me as horrible. And now I will prove thee and my words together." So, while he gazed at her in wonder, she drew out the sword. "With this sword," she said, "I will do one of two things. Choose thou."

The King said, hollow-voiced, "What wilt thou do?"

She said, "With the sword I will lay open this poisonous face of mine;" and she touched her right cheek; "or with it I will cut off this my wicked breast;" and she put her hand upon her left breast, and said again, "Choose thou."

But Menelaus with a loud cry threw himself upon her, and took each of her wrists in a hand, and held her down on the

bed. The sword dropped out and fell to the floor; but he let it lie. Now his love waxed the greater for the danger she had been in. And in the morning, when as she lay as one dead, he picked up the sword and brake it, and threw it out of the window. Also before he left her he gave straight order that she should be watched throughout the day. But he gave the order to Eutyches, believing him to be faithful for his former and latter service.

By and by came Eutyches and spoke again with her, saying, "Lady, I fear me thou didst not use my remedy aright."

She heard him in a stare, and answered in a dry voice, "I fear so too."

Then said Eutyches, "There is but one way to use it. So shalt thou be free from pain and sorrow of heart." She would not look at him, but he knew that she understood his thought. "If thou wilt swear to me by Artemis the Bright,"

THE RUINOUS FACE

he said, "that thou wilt never use it against thyself, I will put another remedy on thy knees, lady."

She swore it; and he fetched her a sword, and put it on her knees. That night, in the dark, she slew her husband Menelaus, as he lay asleep by her side; and she knew that he was dead because, after groaning once, he neither moved nor stirred, and because his foot which was upon her ankle was heavy as lead.

Then came Eutyches in with a torch, and asked her if all was well. She told him what she had done; and Eutyches came close with the torch and saw that the King was dead. Then he said, "Before dawn we must depart, thou and I."

She said, "Where can I go? What will become of me?"

He gazed upon her, saying, "I will love thee for ever, as I have these twelve years and more."

THE RUINOUS FACE

She said to him, "I will go now if thou wilt help me, Eutyches."

He said, "I will help thee when I can."

Then Helen looked at him, and saw his eyes, and was horribly afraid. She said, "I know not whether I can trust thee;" but he answered her:

"Have I not proved that to thee? Did I not give thee the sword with which to free thyself?"

"Yea," she said, "but have I freed myself indeed?"

He stretched out his arms to her, saying, "Free? Yes, thou art free, most glorious one. And now I too am free to love thee."

But she used craft in her fear, saying, "I am soiled with wicked blood. Stay thou here, Eutyches, and I will purify myself, and be as thou wouldst have me."

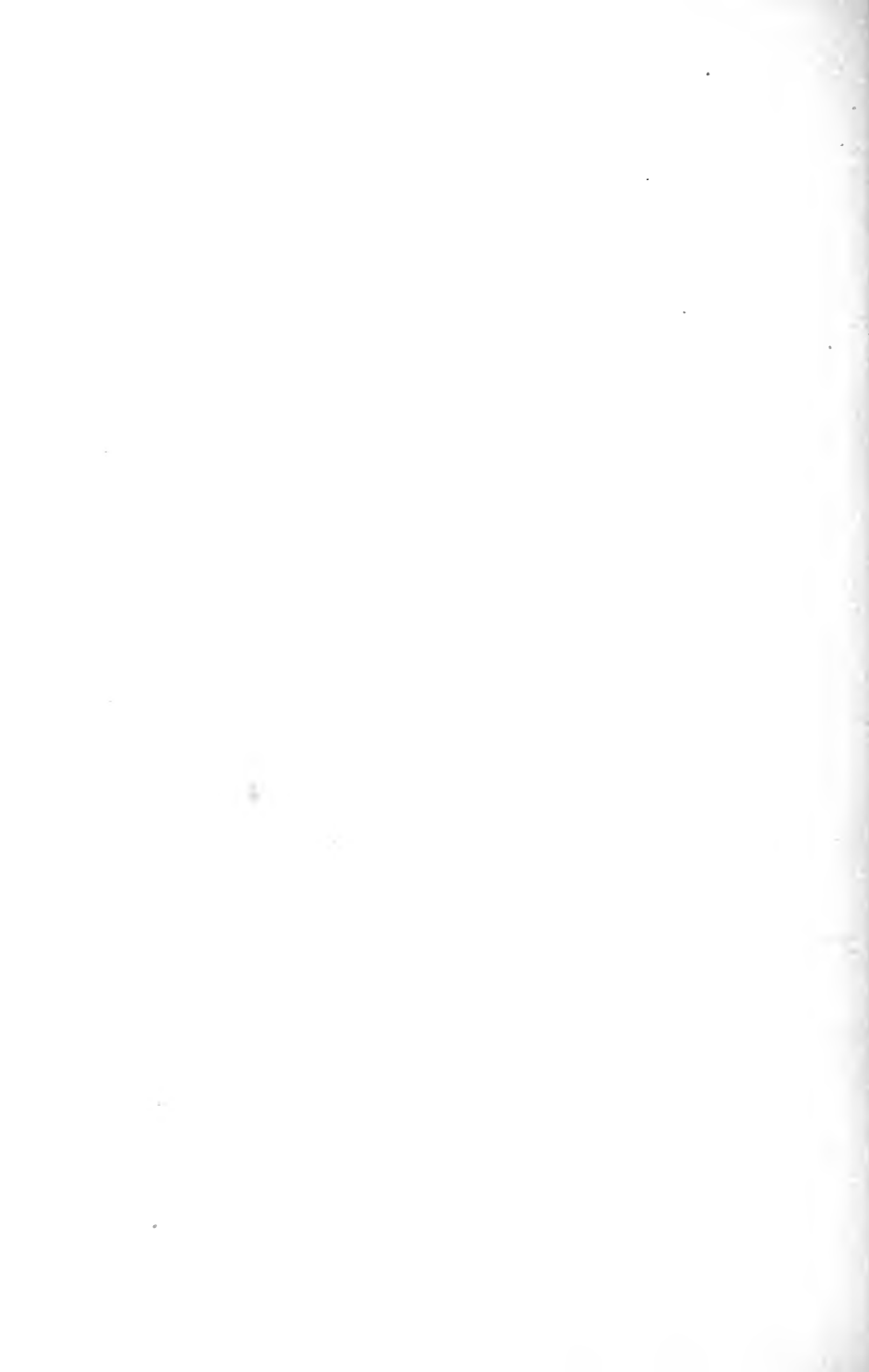
And he let her go with a kiss, saying, "Be quick. Have I not waited twelve years?"

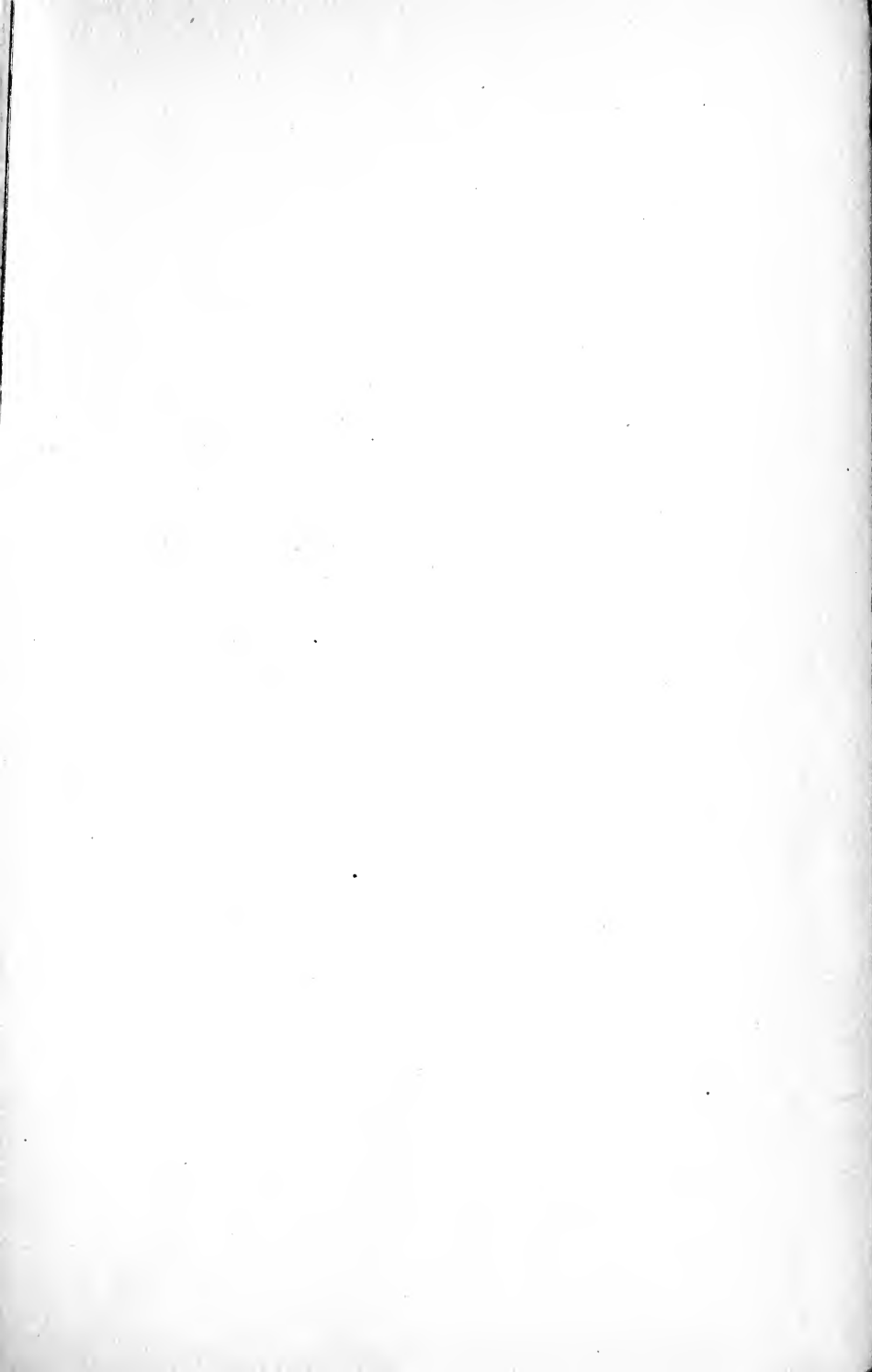


THE RUINOUS FACE

Then Helen arose and went out of the chamber, and out of the house into the garden. And she stood before the altar of Artemis Eileithyia, and prayed before it, saying, "O Holy One, I give thee thanks indeed that now I know the way of peace." And then she went farther into the grove of ilex-trees where the altar and the image stood, and took off her girdle and bound it straightly round her neck. And she clomb the tree, and tied the end of the girdle about the branch thereof; and afterward cast herself down, and hung there quite still. And the cord which she used was of silk, and had girt her raiment about her, below her fair breasts.

THE END





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